

Calls threats to close the border unrealistic

Washington DC - Rep. Linda Sánchez today posted information about the swine flu epidemic on her website and urged her constituents to get factual and updated information before becoming alarmed.

“With the news of a public health emergency on swine flu, it is important for people to get updated and factual information,” said Rep. Linda Sánchez. “This is a cause for concern that requires everyone to take awareness, but not a cause for panic.”

The United States declared a public health emergency due to 40 confirmed cases of swine flu in California, Texas, Ohio, New York and Kansas as well as numerous cases in Mexico. According to health officials, seven people in California have been diagnosed with this form of swine flu.

Swine influenza is a respiratory disease of pigs. Swine flu does not normally infect humans although sporadic human infections do occasionally occur. The symptoms of swine flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular seasonal flu and include fever, lethargy, lack of appetite and coughing. Some people with swine flu also have reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, muscle aches, vomiting and diarrhea.

In response to calls for closing the border to Mexico, Sánchez added, “Closing the border does not make any sense. Not only is it complicated, but would cost the United States millions of dollars in trade and commerce. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano has made it clear that closing the border would only be an option if it were realistic hope of containment, which is certainly not the case. Calls for closing the border are clearly unrealistic and may unnecessarily inflame the immigration debate.”

For more information on swine flu, please visit Rep. Sánchez website at: www.lindasanchez.house.gov or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/>.

USA Today has an informative article today with questions and answers you may have about swine flu. Here are a few:

Q: What is swine flu?

A: It's a common respiratory disease in pigs that doesn't usually spread to people. When pigs catch this flu, many get quite sick, and 1% to 4% die, according to the World Health Organization. In the past, people have sometimes caught swine flu if they worked directly with pigs.

Q: Can you catch swine flu from eating pork?

A: No, according to WHO. Pigs coming in to slaughter facilities are monitored for flu symptoms, and those that are ill are not allowed to enter the food supply. Cooking also kills the virus. People who work with pigs, however, can catch the virus. The Department of Agriculture is conducting tests to confirm that the food supply is safe, said Janet Napolitano, secretary of the

Department of Homeland Security.

Q: Is there a vaccine against swine flu?

A: No, but government scientists could try to create one, according to the CDC. "We've identified the virus," Besser said. "Should we decide to manufacture a vaccine, we can work toward that goal very quickly." CDC scientists don't know if this year's flu vaccine offers any protection.

Q: What are the symptoms?

A: The most common symptoms are fever, fatigue, lack of appetite and coughing, although some people also develop a runny nose, sore throat, vomiting or diarrhea, according to the CDC.

Q: What should you do if you have these symptoms?

A: Stay home from work or school, to avoid spreading your illness to other people, Besser said. Don't get on an airplane. People should call their doctors to ask about the best treatment, but should not simply show up at a clinic or hospital that is unprepared for their arrival.

Q: How can people protect themselves?

A: As always, people should wash their hands frequently, Besser said. In the past, the CDC has said there isn't conclusive evidence to support using face masks. Surgical masks are designed to prevent the wearer from spreading germs, but may also catch large respiratory droplets if someone sneezes nearby. In a 2007 statement, the CDC said these masks could be worn if someone needs to go to a crowded place, such as a grocery store, for a short time. N95 respirator masks filter out 95% of particles to prevent the wearer from breathing them in. These must be fitted properly around the nose to create a seal, so they can make breathing difficult.

Q: What does it mean for the government to declare a public health emergency?

A: While the declaration "sounds more severe than it is," Napolitano said Sunday, it will free up funds and allow health officials to use medications and tests that aren't normally used. The government also issued a public health declaration during recent floods in North Dakota and Minnesota, she said, and noted that the government often issues such declarations when hurricanes are approaching. The federal government is also releasing 25% of the 50 million doses of antiviral medications in the nation's Strategic National Stockpile, Napolitano said. The Department of Defense is also making 7 million doses available.

For entire article, visit:

http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2009-04-26-swine-flu-questions-answers_N.htm